BRITISH COLUMBIA
The Best Place on Earth

2008-00288/

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2006FOR0129-001196
Oct. 5, 2006

Ministry of Forests and Range

PROVINCE INTRODUCES GRASSLAND RECOVERY PROGRAM

VICTORIA – The Province is launching a $2-million ecosystem restoration program to help recover historic grasslands that have been lost to encroaching trees, Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman announced today.

"We've gotten so good at fighting wild fires that some of our forests have become over-crowded and are spreading onto neighbouring grasslands," said Coleman. "This program will help reclaim these critical areas for both wildlife habitat and pasture land."

The program's first recovery project will be based in the East Kootenay region, along the Rocky Mountain Trench. Weather permitting, more than 5,100 hectares of forest and range will be treated in 2007/08 using a combination of harvesting, slashing, spacing and prescribed burning.

The work aims to thin-out crowded sections of forest and clear native grasslands of encroaching trees. Historically, these ecosystems were maintained by naturally occurring wildfires; however, decades of fire suppression has altered the landscape.

Restoring a balance will promote biodiversity, higher quality timber and overall resilience to pests and disease. Other benefits include: reduced risk of catastrophic wildfire and increased habitat for grassland plants and animals.

"The declining forage base for wildlife and livestock has been an issue in the Trench for 50 years," said Bill Bennett, East Kootenay MLA and Minister of State for Mining. "As an MLA, I have no other issue where so many diverse groups and individuals agree that more must be done. This announcement is very gratifying and will be well-received by hunters, ranchers and conservationists."

Additional restoration projects are planned for the Central Cariboo Forest District in 2007/08. More than 1,100 hectares are being considered for treatment.

The $2-million provincial program will be funded through the Forest Investment Account for the 2007/08 fiscal year.

-30-

Media contact: Jennifer McLarty
Public Affairs Officer
250 387-4592

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.